

THREE EARLY BYZANTINE SILVER CROSSES

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Three Byzantine silver crosses have recently come to light from the period just before the iconoclast controversy. One of them, now preserved in the Archeological Museum, Istanbul, is dated by its stamps.¹ Two others are in the collection of George Ortiz, Geneva, and do not have stamps.² All three are valuable additions to the Christian heritage and contribute to our understanding of silver workshops in the sixth and seventh centuries. The stamps on the Istanbul cross shed further light on the history of Byzantine silver stamps and the organization for stamping silver.³

¹N. Firatlı, "Some Recent Acquisitions," *Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Yilligi* (Annual of the Archeological Museums of Istanbul) 15–16 (1969), 197, fig. 14. Firatlı mentions a "composite cross" also from the same find. I was not permitted to see this cross, but Cyril Mango describes it as composed of five small crosses attached to each other, one cross forming each arm and the fifth in the center (verbal report). Publication of this cross awaits a future opportunity.

²Unpublished.

³The ideas presented here build upon conclusions reached in two earlier studies: *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, DOS 7 (Washington, D.C., 1961) (hereafter *BSS*) and *Byzantine Silver Treasures*, Monographien der Abegg-Stiftung Bern 9 (1973) (hereafter *BST*). The earlier study was undertaken at Dumbarton Oaks, under the guidance of Ernst Kitzinger, then Director of Studies. The fact that it remains today largely unchallenged is a tribute to his wise guidance, conscientious supervision, and meticulous attention to detail. This short article is offered in grateful recognition and thanks.

Although the dating of the stamps has now been generally accepted, two conclusions reached in *BSS* and further developed in *BST* are presently under question: the first is the conclusion that all "Imperial" stamps were applied in Constantinople and not elsewhere as well. The second follows upon the first. It is that the majority of silver objects stamped in Constantinople display a consistent style and iconography, the identification of which clarifies artistic trends in the sixth and seventh centuries and also throws light on general questions of workshop and industrial production. Such basic questions cannot be reviewed in these few pages. Instead, this article records three more silver objects of substance in the existing evidence. It is worth noting that these objects recently discovered reinforce and support ideas presented earlier.

DESCRIPTION

The cross in Istanbul (Figs. 1–5) was found in excavations at Divrigi, near the village of Opsikom, in 1969.⁴ It is exceptionally large, measuring 58 cm in height, including the tang, and 31.2 cm across.⁵ It is formed of one sheet of silver, with carved relief on one side (Fig. 1) and an Armenian inscription incised on the other (Fig. 2). The tang at the foot of the cross is preserved; by this means it was attached to a staff for carrying in procession or was attached to a stand on the altar (Fig. 5).⁶ On the front of the cross (Fig. 1), at the end of each arm and in the center, is a roundel with incised and gently modeled relief. In the center the roundel contains the nimbed bust of the Virgin (Fig. 3) with a cross on her headdress. At the top arm is the bust of Christ (Fig. 4) with a cruciform nimbus, holding a book in his left hand (although neither hand is actually visible). In the roundels in the cross arms, on either side of the Virgin, are angels, presumably Michael and Gabriel, although there is no inscription to identify the figures in any of the roundels. At the foot of the cross is another nimbed bust, resembling the Virgin except that the head-

⁴Firatlı wrote that the village of Opsikom is mentioned in the inscription, but this has not been confirmed; see below, note 7.

⁵The great cross from Antioch, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (no. 1, below), is the largest silver cross to have survived, but there are several bronze crosses that are also impressively big. (See K. Weitzmann and I. Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross at Mount Sinai," *DOP* 17 (1963), 385 ff; M. Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium: The Kaper Koraon and Related Treasures* (Baltimore, 1986), no. 42a–c. Of these, only the bronze cross of S. Vitale, at 168 cm, is larger than the Metropolitan Museum cross. To the number published by Weitzmann-Ševčenko and Mundell Mango should be added a large bronze cross in the collection of Henri Pharaon, in Beirut, for which the dimensions are not presently available but which appears to be about one meter in height.

⁶M. C. Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Mediaeval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, I. Metalwork, Ceramics, Glass, Glyptics, Painting* (Washington, D.C., 1962), 19, no. 14; G. Downey, "A Processional Cross," *BMMA* (1934), 276.

dress is simple, without a cross, and her cloak is knotted across the chest. The arms of the cross are outlined with simple, incised lines. Traces of gilding remain in the roundels and along the edges of the arms.

On the back (Fig. 2) is an inscription in Armenian, roughly incised in rather crude letters.

Down from the top:

† ԳՈՀԱՆԱԼՈՎ ՄԱՏՈՒՑԱՆԷ ԲԱՐԵՆԱԻՍԻՆ ԻՒՐՈՅ

On the arms:

ՄՐԲՈՅ ԳԵՈՐԳԻ ՃԱԳԻՆԿՈՄ

"In gratitude offers to his/her intercessor, Saint George, ĆAGINKOM."⁷

In the bottom, center, of each side arm is a roughly cut hole through which is hung a chain. On one chain is the letter Օ, cut from a silver sheet. The other ornament is lost, but there must once have hung an A. These same letters are preserved with their chains still intact on the Ortiz cross described below (Fig. 8).

Four Imperial stamps are clearly visible on the tang of this cross, a cross stamp, a square, a round, and the remains of a long stamp (Fig. 5). These stamps date the cross in the period of Justinian, and the type of cross stamp occurs earlier within the date of his reign, ca. A.D. 547.⁸

Two crosses in the collection of George Ortiz, Geneva, are here published for the first time. One cross (Figs. 6, 7) is elaborately decorated, gilded,

with niello inscriptions on both back and front, and a roundel containing the bust of Christ attached to the front in the center. The origin of the cross is not known, but it is said to have come from Asia Minor. The height is 21.8 cm, without the jagged edge of the tang remaining at the bottom (Fig. 7); the width across the arms is 16.1 cm; weight, 400 g. The arms are framed on both back and front with a plaited rope pattern, finely executed and heavily gilded. The plait is simpler on the back than on the front, for it shows only three plaited strands, whereas the three strands on the front of the cross are themselves embellished by twisted rope on either side. This ornate border is broken at the ends of the arms on both back and front by deep gashes that show nail holes. Two of the nails are still in place. At the top of the cross, on the back, a silver fragment remains attached by the nail, but it is broken at the end of the arm. At the foot of the cross, in the front, there is a "loop" of plaited rope, different from the rope pattern on the front but like the rope pattern on the back of the cross. It contains or frames a gilded face, in relief, with no hair, slanted eyes, heavy beard, and moustache. The gold plait is preserved around the end of the cross on both back and front; under this "loop," but on the back under the plait, a jagged end shows where the original silver tang has broken off.

The central medallion on the front (Fig. 6), with gilded relief of the bust of Christ, was a later addition to the cross. Two nails break into the niello inscription on either side of the bust: IC XP. These nails also break into the incised roundel that decorates the back. This roundel is described by means of two simple, incised lines containing an incised cross formed by intersecting semicircles. This incised cross is gilded. Rough, incised lines filled with black niello define the base of the arms of the cross, outside the medallion. Like the famous cross of Justin II,⁹ the Ortiz cross is made of two sheets of silver laid over an iron core. There is a gap between the sheets on both sides of the core, at the bottom, which suggests that at some time a rod was forced between them, perhaps when the original tang snapped off (Fig. 7). All these factors suggest that the tang broke off at an early period in the life of the cross and that, when this hap-

⁷This inscription, according to my tentative transcription, was read by Prof. Sirarpie Der Nersessian, the Rev. Bishop Papken, S.T.D., of the Armenian Church in Virginia, Dr. Hovsep Yenikomshian, and Miss Sirarpie Ohanessian. Lately, a transcription and photograph by Prof. Cyril Mango was again read by Prof. Robert Thomson. As mentioned above, N. Firath associates ĆAGINKOM with the modern village of Opsikom, where the cross was found. M. Mundell Mango has noted that the word KOM suggests the Greek word KOMH, familiar in inscriptions to indicate the village where the church was located as, for example, on the cross from Phela (Ross, *Catalogue of Byzantine Antiquities*, no. 14). Professor Thomson adds: "If Mrs Mango is correct in identifying KOM as 'village' (but why a Greek word in a purely Armenian inscription?), then ĆAGIN could be read (in Armenian) as the genitive of ĆAG. There are place names with a root ĆAK (see H. Hirschmann, *Die altarmenische Ortsnamen*, 435), but I have failed to turn up a ĆAG. . . . The script looks early to me (6th–7th century) but I could not tell from the photograph whether or not the inscription was carved at the time the cross was made" (letter of 16 December 1985). I am very grateful to my distinguished colleagues and friends who have given generously of their time and expertise in the reading of this inscription.

⁸BSS, 15 f. The stamps on this cross are discussed individually in my forthcoming catalogue, *Byzantine Silver Stamps, Supplement, Including the Sion Treasure* (below, p. 179).

⁹*Frühchristliche Kunst aus Rom*, catalogue of the exhibition held at the Villa Hugel (Essen, 1962), 221, no. 463, with earlier bibliography; V. H. Elbern, "Zum Justinuskreuz im Schatz von Sankt Peter in Rom," *JBM* 6 (1964), 33 ff; C. Belting-Ihm, "Das Justinus-Kreuz in der Schatzkammern der Peterskirche zu Rom," *JZMM* 12 (1965), 142 ff; *BST*, fig. 45.

pened, an iron rod was pushed between the sheets of silver in order to support the cross. The broken elements at the ends of the arms may then have been silver clamps attached in order to hold the two sheets of silver together at the arm ends, as these threatened to separate when the rod was inserted. Evidently the cross suffered repairs on more than one occasion, but most of these repairs appear to be ancient.

On the back of the cross (Fig. 7) is an inscription in niello. The letters are uneven, and the text is "garbled and illiterate."¹⁰

On the back of the cross, on the top arm:

+ Ἄγιος, ἅγιος, ἄγιος Σαβάωθ, πλήρης οὐρανὸς
καὶ ἡ τῆς δόξης [αὐτοῦ]

"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts, Heaven and earth are filled with thy glory." The Tersanctus, based on Isa. 6:3.

On the back, bottom arm:

ὡσαννὰ ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος
ἐν ὀνόματι [κυρίου]

"Hosanna in the highest, Blessed is he that cometh in the name (of the Lord)."

On the back of the cross, left arm: $\overline{\text{KY}}$ $\overline{\text{K}}$ επεφα
"Lord of"

On the back, right arm: εὐλογημένο "Blessed"

On the front of the cross, upper arm: $\overline{\text{IC}}$: ἰέσου
"Jesus"

On the front, bottom arm:
 $\overline{\text{XI}}$ $\overline{\text{KY}}$: χρῖστος κύριου βοῦθ[η] τοῦ σοῦ
δούλο[υ] γεόργι[ου]

"Christ, Lord, Help thy servant Georgios."

On the front, left and right arms: NI KE "Victory."

A second cross in the collection of George Ortiz (Fig. 8) is relatively plain, and the provenance, once more, is not known. The cross is formed of a single sheet of silver with no inscriptions. It has flared arms with pearl-shaped knobs at the corners, like the Istanbul cross and like other crosses

of this type described below. It is slightly larger than the gilded cross above, measuring 24.7 cm in height and 16.2 cm wide. The tang has become separated from the cross but is still intact and measures an additional 6.7 cm so that the entire length of the cross with the tang measures 31.4 cm, whereas the Istanbul cross, with the tang, is nearly double this size. The only decoration, a thin, incised line, frames the arms. In each of the arms are two holes, at the lower edge. The letters A and Ω, still on their chains, have been separated from the cross but were evidently found close by it and were acquired with it. The arms of the Ortiz cross show two holes, however, instead of one, which suggests that other letters, perhaps I and X, may have hung there or, like the cross of Justin II (below, no. 5), jewels or pearls. Two large crosses in the Walters Art Gallery (below, nos. 6, 7) have similar holes in the arms, but no attachments have survived.¹¹

STYLISTIC AND ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

The three crosses just described are part of a rich tradition of church crosses preserved from the sixth and seventh centuries. Some of them are in either gilded or plain silver, in silver revetment over bronze, or in the cheaper metal, bronze. Any gold crosses to have survived are invariably small and were used as ornament or jewelry. There must once have been many in wood. The best-known cross to have survived is the cross presented by Justin II to the Vatican, which apparently remained above ground in the treasury of St. Peter's (above, note 9; below, no. 5). A list of the better-known Byzantine silver crosses follows, in order of height:

1. The Antioch cross, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.¹² Ht. 148.5 cm; w. 95 cm (Downey)

¹¹ See also the bronze cross in Vienna, Kunsthistorische Museum, in the form of a monogram, with an A and Ω hanging from the arms: R. Noll, *Vom Altertum zum Mittelalter, Katalog der Antikensammlung*, I (Vienna, 1974), no. 12, pl. 23, with earlier bibliography. A Coptic cross in Berlin, also silver, has four holes at the bottom of each side arm and holes in each of the corners of the side arms and in the top arm. These holes may have been intended to attach the cross to something like a wooden frame, a coffer, or an altar. If this were so, however, the holes would not be only on the lower part of the side arms and none on the foot; see K. Wessel, *Koptische Kunst, die Spätantike in Ägypten* (Recklinghausen, 1963), figs. 16, 21, 133–35.

¹² G. Downey, *BMMA* (1934), 276–80, with earlier bibliography; *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, catalogue of the exhibition held at the Baltimore Museum of Art, organized by the Walters Art Gallery (Baltimore, 1947), no. 389; Weitzmann and Ševčenko, "The Moses Cross at Mount Sinai," 398 note 53; Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 42.

¹⁰ The words from Cyril Mango, whose further advice in the reading of this inscription was invaluable and kindly given. The "back" and the "front" of the cross are here determined by the medallion of the bust of Christ which occurs, presumably, on the "front." That this was not the original intention for this cross is discussed below.

2. A second cross from the Antioch treasure, present location unknown¹³
3. The Armenian cross, National Archeological Museum, Istanbul.¹⁴ Ht. 58 cm; w. 31.2 cm
4. Cross from the village of Phela, Dumbarton Oaks Collection, Washington, D.C.¹⁵ Ht. 47.6 cm; w. 28.4 cm; wt. 565 g (Ross)
5. Cross of Justin II, Vatican Museum.¹⁶ Ht. 40 cm; w. 31.2 cm (Belting-Ihm)
6. Inscribed cross from the first Hama treasure, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, no. 57.632.¹⁷ Ht. (without tang) 33.8 cm; w. 20.6 cm (Mundell Mango)
7. Plain cross from the first Hama treasure, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, no. 57.641.¹⁸ Ht. (without tang) 33.0 cm; w. 26.7 cm (Mundell Mango)
8. Cross from Luxor, National Museum, Cairo.¹⁹ Ht. 29.9 cm (without tang); w. 21.2 cm (Strzygowski)
9. Plain cross in the Ortiz Collection. Ht. 24.7 cm; w. 16.2 cm
10. Gilded cross in the Ortiz Collection. Ht. 21.8 cm; w. 16.1 cm
11. Plain cross from the second Hama treasure, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, no. 57.1827.²⁰ Ht. 17.0 cm; w. 11.5 cm (Mundell Mango)
12. Inscribed cross from the second Hama treasure, Toledo Museum of Art, no. 53.48a.²¹ Ht. 18.6 cm; w. 12.9 cm (Toledo Museum)
13. Small inscribed cross from the first Hama treasure; inscribed for John, son of Symeonis; Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, no. 57.630.²² Ht. 11.9 cm; w. 8.5 cm
14. Small, inscribed cross from the first Hama treasure; inscribed for Thomas, son of Isaac; Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, no. 57.629.²³ Ht. 10.9 cm; w. 8.6 cm

Crosses such as these²⁴ must have been part of every church treasure, and it is evident that in the ceremonies of the sixth and seventh centuries they had special significance.²⁵

It is worth noting that pairs of crosses were found in three of the famous treasures from Syria, suggesting more than coincidence. There may, indeed, have been an explicit purpose for two crosses of slightly different size in the liturgy, conforming to the relative importance of the Sunday or the daily processional ceremonies, or to the importance of the church dignitary who carried the cross in procession. Two crosses, one inscribed with a dedication to St. Sergius by Kuriakos (no. 6) and one plain cross (no. 7), were found in the first Hama treasure, and two small crosses (nos. 13, 14), both similarly inscribed with dedications, were also found with this treasure. The dimensions both follow the same pattern, one slightly larger than the other. Two crosses, one slightly larger than the other, one plain and one inscribed, were found in the second Hama treasure (nos. 11, 12). Two large crosses were found with the Antioch treasure (nos. 1, 2), and two crosses were found at Divrigi (see note 1 above).

¹³This cross was originally listed in the first Antioch treasure but has since been lost. See Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 43; E. Coche de la Ferté published two fragments of a cross in the Louvre, found at Antioch, which have since been identified by Mundell Mango and Margaret Frazer as the central medallions for the cross in the Metropolitan Museum, no. 1 above (E. Coche de la Ferté, *L'antiquité chrétienne* [Paris, 1958], 45).

¹⁴Above, note 1.

¹⁵Ross, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Antiquities* (above, note 6); Dodd *BST*, 26, 27; J. P. C. Kent and K. S. Painter, *Wealth of the Roman World* (London, 1977), no. 146; Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 65.

¹⁶Note 9 above.

¹⁷C. Diehl, "Un nouveau trésor d'argenterie syrienne," *Syria* 7 (1926), 109–10, pl. xxii; *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, no. 404; Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 7.

¹⁸Diehl, "Nouveau trésor," no. 15, pl. xxiv; *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, no. 405; Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 8.

¹⁹J. Strzygowski, *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire* (Vienna, 1904), 340, no. 7201, pl. xxxix; O. M. Dalton, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology* (Oxford, 1911), 565, 567.

²⁰M. C. Ross, "A Second Byzantine Silver Treasure from Hama," *Archaeology* 3 (1950), 162, no. 3, fig. 2; *ibid.*, 6 (1953), 38; Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 68.

²¹As for note 20 above. Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 67. I am grateful to William Hutton, Senior Curator at the Toledo Museum of Art, for permission to publish this cross and for superb photographs.

²²Diehl, "Nouveau trésor," no. 13; *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, no. 407; Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 10.

²³Diehl, "Nouveau trésor," no. 12; *Early Christian and Byzantine Art*, no. 406; Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 9.

²⁴The Coptic cross in Berlin might have been included in this list. Wessel rightly observes, however, that this cross is a different type from the crosses under discussion: *Koptische Kunst* (above, note 11), 133–35. A silver-plated bronze cross in the Louvre (C. Metzger, "Croix à inscription votive," *Revue du Louvre* 22 [1972], 32–34) is in the same style as the crosses listed and should be considered in the same category.

²⁵Ross, *Catalogue of Byzantine Antiquities*, 20 and nos. 64–67.

Further, from the arms of the plain Ortiz cross, dangle an alpha and omega, but both their chains are detached so that it is not clear which letter hung from which arm. The Istanbul cross retains an omega on a chain dangling from the right arm, when the cross is viewed from the "back," the side with the dedication. This chain is apparently in the position from which it originally hung. In this instance, it indicates that this particular cross was intended to be carried in procession rather than placed on an altar, for the omega must be the second letter and must therefore hang on the right arm if the cross is viewed from the back, that is to say, from the point of view of the people in procession behind it. Thus the inscription is on the back, and the roundels containing representations of Christ, Mary, and angels are, figuratively speaking, leading the procession, facing away from the crowd behind. If this cross were placed on an altar in order to preserve the sequence alpha and omega, the dedication inscription would be facing the congregation and the sacred images would be facing behind the altar, a situation that does not seem to be appropriate. G. Downey discussed the inscription on the large cross in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (no. 1) which is inscribed with the Trisagion, and he described the liturgical associations of this inscription. The invocation is on the "front" of the cross, and a dedication inscription is on the "back." Downey observed that this cross may have been intended either to be placed on an altar or to be carried by two people in procession. A cross of this size is actually portrayed being carried by two people on the book covers, if such they be, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.²⁶

A cross in Toledo, from the second Hama treasure (no. 12), has an invocation similar to the inscription on the Antioch and Ortiz crosses, but the words are even more specific.

On the back of the cross: Σώσου ἡμᾶς υἱε τοῦ θεοῦ

"Have mercy on us, Son of God."

²⁶ Above, note 6. For illustration and a more recent bibliography of the book covers, see *BST*, 21 note 42. For a discussion of the cross motif in the 6th century see also E. Kitzinger, "A Pair of Silver Book Covers in the Sion Treasure," *Gatherings in Honor of Dorothy E. Miner*, ed. U. E. McCracken, L. M. S. Randall, and R. H. Randall, Jr. (Baltimore, 1974), 3–17. The use of the Trisagion on the cross is discussed by Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, no. 42. The Trisagion is also inscribed on the silver-plated cross in the Louvre (above, note 24), which has a dedication on the reverse.

On the front: ὁ σταυρώθης ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν
"He who was crucified for us."

Thus, on the back, the inscription refers to those who walk in the procession behind and, on the front, is a verbal image of the crucified Christ, as if he were himself leading the procession. These inscriptions are sensible if they are understood in terms of the procession, rather than for a fixed position on the altar. Indeed, this particular inscription and this particular image suggest that this cross was reserved for the Easter processions, whereas the second cross, a plain one in the Walters Art Gallery, from the same treasure (no. 11), was used for the daily or Sunday ceremonies.

Likewise, the images of Christ and the Virgin on the Istanbul cross are suitable for the place at the head of a procession. The cross of Justin II is similar to the Istanbul cross in that the images of Christ, Emperor Justin II, and his empress, and the figure of the Agnus Dei in the center are represented on the front of the cross, and the dedication inscription is on the back. These crosses were apparently intended to be carried by the highest dignitary in the church, he who walked in the shoes of St. Peter. In contemporary sixth-century imagery St. Peter is identified by the cross that he carries, which is a cross on a staff like those under discussion.²⁷ In the late sixth and seventh centuries the cross was the single most powerful symbol in the church, evocative of triumph over death, the Life Everlasting. The verses thus chosen to be inscribed on the crosses express in words the meaning of the image. Like the verse of the Crucifixion on the front of the Toledo cross, the image of the Crucifixion is actually portrayed on a Coptic cross in Berlin.²⁸

In this way the inscriptions on the Antioch cross, the Ortiz cross, the cross in Toledo, and the cross in the Louvre (see note 24) acquire an iconographic function similar to the pictorial images on the Armenian cross, the cross of Justin II, or the Coptic cross in Berlin. The verbal image functions as a replacement for the pictorial image. This substitution of words for image appears frequently in mosaics and also in other media in the late sixth and seventh centuries, and the practice appears to have developed in response to iconoclast demands.

²⁷ E. Cruikshank Dodd, "A Silver Vessel in the Collection of Elie Borowski," *Okeanos, Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 7 (1983), 145–47.

²⁸ See notes 24 and 26 above; *BST*, 28, 30.



1. Armenian cross, front, National Archeological Museum, Istanbul



2. Armenian cross, back, National Archeological Museum, Istanbul



3. Armenian cross, front, detail: center roundel with bust of the Virgin;
National Archeological Museum, Istanbul



4. Armenian cross, front, detail: roundel with bust of Christ, top arm;
National Archeological Museum, Istanbul



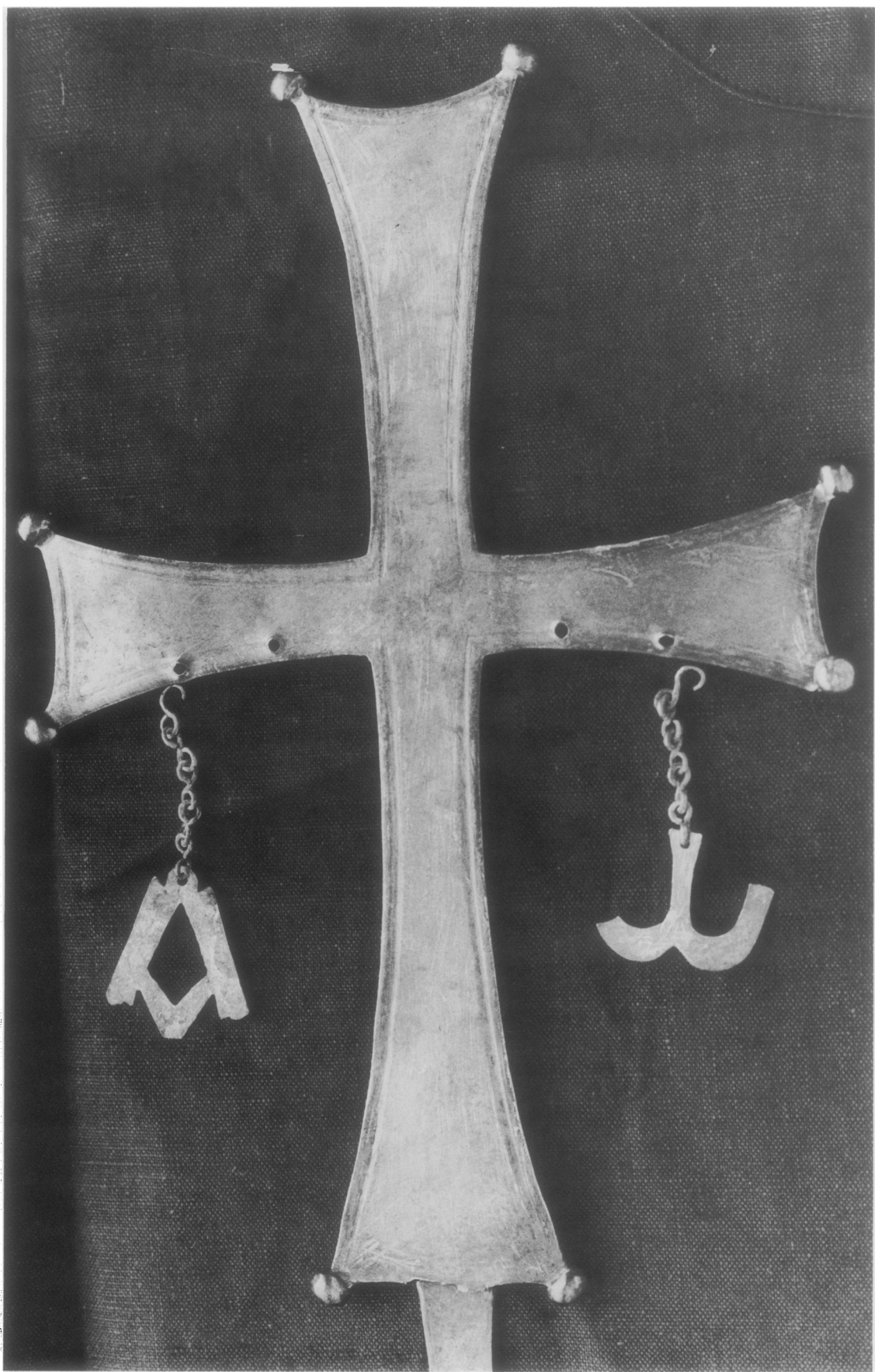
5. Armenian cross, detail; stamps; National Archeological Museum, Istanbul



6. Processional cross, "front," George Ortiz Collection, Geneva (photo: George Ortiz Collection)



7. Processional cross, "back," George Ortiz Collection, Geneva (photo: George Ortiz Collection)



8. Silver cross, George Ortiz Collection, Geneva

Indeed, it has generally been thought that Iconoclasm was the result of Semitic influences in Christian art. In my article "The Image of the Word,"²⁹ I have argued that the reverse is the case, that iconoclast Christian art laid the grounds for development of Islamic iconoclasm. However this may be, when the images on the cross, either verbal or figural, are understood in the context of their actual position on the cross and, in turn, the position of the cross is understood in the context of the role it played in the liturgy and the position it occupied in the procession, these images acquire extraordinary dynamism. In this greater context, the importance of the image and how it was represented, the problems that gave rise to the quarrels of Iconoclasm are especially comprehensible.

Whereas the roundels containing the figure of Christ, the Virgin, and angels are iconographically common for this period, their placement on the Armenian cross is unusual. There is no clue to the identification of the female saint at the foot of the cross, unless she is connected with the unidentified words of the inscription. That the Virgin, rather than Christ or St. Peter, occupies the position in the center of the cross, and that Christ is on the upper arm, would suggest that this cross was dedicated to a church of the Mother of God or, at least, to a particular institution connected with the Virgin, or to a convent.

Whereas the Armenian cross shows the figures on one side of the cross and the inscription of dedication on the other, not so the cross in the Ortiz Collection. Here the invocation is on the "back," whereas the medallion of Christ and the dedication are on the "front" of the cross. Both are crudely inscribed, with mistakes in orthography, grammar, and calligraphy. As the engraver proceeded from the top arm of the cross to the bottom, the writing becomes smaller as the space becomes cramped. The inscription of dedication, on the "front," left no room to complete the name of Georgios. Nevertheless, the dedication of Georgios, awkward as it may be, conforms to the practice just described of placing the dedication on the opposite side of the cross to the invocation. It was observed above that the roundel of Christ was a later addition. It was tacked on to the "back" of the cross, the side with the dedication, rather than onto the "front," the side with the invocation, and

thereby it reversed the iconographic intention of the inscriptions. A cross of fine workmanship and provenance was apparently badly treated by a local, provincial craftsman or prelate, probably out of ignorance.

The roundel of Christ on the Ortiz cross must have been acquired originally from a superior workshop, however, because it is of excellent quality. Both stylistically and iconographically, the bust of Christ is very different from the face at the bottom of the cross. It was hammered from the back and chased from the front. Christ is in frontal position, as for the Pantokrator, with long, wavy hair and beard, a crossed nimbus, two fingers of his right hand raised in blessing, and his left hand holding a book. The style is similar to the style of a roundel on the Hermitage reliquary, from the reign of Justinian I.³⁰ It is also similar to the roundel containing Christ on the Armenian cross, from the reign of Justinian I (Fig. 4), although it is of finer, deeper modeling. In turn, the style of the angels on both arms of the Armenian cross is remarkably close to comparable roundels on the back of the Hermitage reliquary.³¹

The somewhat incongruous face in the loop on the front of the Ortiz cross, at the bottom, on the other hand, has apparently no connection with the iconography of the cross or the medallion of Christ. It is in a style that may be roughly described as "Sasanian," or from the Eastern provinces.³² It is not clear who is depicted, but it may be the dignitary who presented this cross to his church.³³ The inscription is cramped, indeed, by

The substitution of verbal for figural imagery recalls the words of John Chrysostom: "We enjoy the presence of the saints in their writings, in which we have images, not of their bodies, but of their souls, since their words are images of their souls"; or Gregory of Nyssa: "One should not worship the form of the Servant, but God the Logos, existing in the glory of the Father and in the form of God." Text and translation by M. V. Anastos, "The Ethical Theory of Images Formulated by the Iconoclasts in 754 and 815," *DOP* 8 (1954), 154 and 157 note 24.

³⁰BSS, no. 17; BST, fig. 39. A. Effenberger, B. Maršak, V. Zaleskaja, and I. Zaseckaja, *Spätantike und frühbyzantinische Silbergefäße aus der Staatlichen Ermitage Leningrad*, catalogue of the exhibition, Staatlichen Museen, Berlin, December 1978–March 1979 (Berlin, 1978), no. 8, fig. 59.

³¹Effenberger et al., *Silbergefäße*, fig. 60; N. Béclaev, "Le reliquaire de Chersonèse," *SK* 3 (Prague, 1929), pl. xix.

³²The nearest comparison that comes to mind is the curious face on the silver phalera with Byzantine stamps at Dumbarton Oaks: A. Alföldi and E. Cruikshank, "A Sassanian Silver Phalera at Dumbarton Oaks," *DOP* 11 (1957), 237–45, with illustrations of comparable faces. The association of Sasanian, or Eastern, motifs with Byzantine motifs is by no means uncommon in this period: see Dodd, *Okeanos* (note 27 above), *passim*.

³³An ivory plaque in the Städtliche Museum, Metz, showing the scene of the Crucifixion, has at the bottom of the cross a

²⁹*Berytus* 18 (1969), 35–61; the thesis was again summarized in Dodd and Khairallah, *The Image of the Word* (Beirut, 1981), 10 ff, 20.

the space allotted to this portrait, which suggests that both were added to the cross at the same time.

The plaited decoration around the edges of the Ortiz cross is common to objects of the late sixth and seventh centuries, for example, on the chalices in the Cleveland Museum of Art,³⁴ the Homs vase,³⁵ or the Vatican reliquary.³⁶ A similar plaited wreath decorates a censer with Imperial stamps from the sixth century that has recently come to light and is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.³⁷ Although this motif is too common to indicate a precise date or place of manufacture, the design is found on objects of highest quality, and the Ortiz cross is not inferior to any of these.

In summary, stylistic and iconographic affinities between the relief on the Armenian cross, the roundel on the Ortiz cross and its decoration, and other objects with Constantinopolitan stamps support conclusions reached earlier concerning Constantinopolitan workshops and their stylistic integrity. It has been suggested that objects stamped in Constantinople in the sixth and seventh centuries were decorated in a uniform style and a consistent iconography that distinguished them from workshops in other major centers.³⁸ These conclusions are dependent, however, upon the assumption that Imperial stamps were applied in Constantinople and not elsewhere.³⁹ Meanwhile, the style and iconography of the figures on the Armenian cross indeed suggest that the cross was not only stamped but also decorated in the capital during the reign of Justinian I. The roundel of Christ on the Ortiz cross is in the same stylistic tradition. It was placed on a cross that in technique and quality resembles the cross of Justin II but that was damaged by subsequent work in a provincial center. The inscriptions on both the Armenian cross and the Ortiz cross are comparatively crude and, like the Sasanian type head, were added by provincial

workmen from a center far from Constantinople.⁴⁰

The third cross under discussion, the plain cross in the Ortiz Collection, with no inscriptions and no relief, is not even gilded. Nevertheless, the graceful proportions, with slender arms flaring at the ends and pearl knobs at the corners, resemble the cross from Istanbul.⁴¹ The proportions of vertical shaft to cross arms and the gently curving outline are common to other crosses, for example, the cross from the village of Phela (no. 4) or the cross of Justin II. Whether or not the plain cross in the Ortiz Collection was actually made in Constantinople, it does conform to the Imperial tradition of the sixth century.

THE STAMPS

Among the crosses described, only the Armenian cross has Byzantine silver stamps and can thereby be precisely dated. Even the cross of Justin II, which was presented by the emperor to the Vatican, and was presumably made in Constantinople, does not show evidence of being stamped in the capital. The stamps on the Armenian cross belong in every respect to the Imperial series and show no irregularities.⁴²

Four stamps are clearly visible on the tang of this cross (Fig. 5): a cross stamp, a square, a round, and the remains of a long stamp. They were applied after the sheet of silver was cut, for they are placed in a single line on the tang rather than in a circle, as for a plate, or on the base within the concave foot, as for a chalice or a candlestick. The long stamp is broken by the hole left by a nail driven into the staff that held the cross. The square and long stamps are broken by the edge of the tang, which indicates that the edge was cut only after the stamps were applied. The fact that there are only four stamps instead of the more usual five, as well as their method of application, recalls the stamps on two flabella from Stuma and Riha, objects that were attached to wooden staffs, like the Armenian cross.⁴³ It has been observed that in these examples also the stamps were applied before the object was finished and, like the Istanbul cross, the stamps

small bust inscribed with the name of the donor, one Adalbero II, who reigned A.D. 984–1005. This cross is of much later date than the Ortiz cross, but the fashion of presenting the bust of the donor at the foot of the cross is remarkably similar. I am indebted to Prof. William Tronzo for this very interesting reference.

³⁴J. Milliken, *Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 38:6 (1951), 142–45; L. Bréhier, "Un trésor d'argenterie ancienne au Musée de Cleveland," *Syria* 28 (1951), 256–64; *BST*, 17, 18, 56.

³⁵E. Coche de la Ferté, *L'antiquité chrétienne*, no. 49, with earlier bibliography; *BST*, 7, 54.

³⁶*BSS*, no. 47, with earlier references; *BST*, fig. 41b.

³⁷To be published shortly by Margaret Frazer in *BMMA*.

³⁸See *BST*, 34–52.

³⁹Below, p. 179.

⁴⁰*BST*, 34–53.

⁴¹For a discussion of comparable crosses on plates, and their significance in the 6th and 7th centuries, see *BST*, 51–52; Kitzinger, "A Pair of Silver Book Covers" (above, note 26), gives further illustrations of crosses on book covers, and in manuscript illumination, with full bibliography on the iconography of the cross.

⁴²For a full description of the Imperial stamping system, see *BSS*, 5–18.

⁴³*BSS*, nos. 21, 22.

were applied on the back rather than on the front of the object.⁴⁴ So, too, on the flabella, only four stamps are visible. The Riha paten⁴⁵ has stamps identical in every respect with the stamps on the flabella, except that it has five instead of four stamps. In other words, the three objects, the Riha paten and the two flabella, were stamped at the same time, and it is most likely that, in this event, they all once had five stamps. In this case the fifth stamp on the two flabella disappeared during the process of final decoration. No reason has been discovered for the appearance of four stamps instead of five on the flabella⁴⁶ other than that there was more often than not an interval of time between the stamping of a silver vessel and its final decoration, and that the fifth stamp disappeared during final work on the object. The implications of this two-step process in the manufacture of silver vessels is still not generally taken into account. Since the publication of *Byzantine Silver Stamps* it has been largely assumed that all objects with Imperial stamps were both stamped and decorated in Constantinople, but this is not necessarily true. It is evident that objects stamped in Constantinople were frequently decorated in a provincial center.⁴⁷ Moreover, the conclusions reached in *Byzantine Silver Stamps*, that Imperial stamps were applied in Constantinople,⁴⁸ and only in Constantinople, was generally accepted until lately, when the question was raised again.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, about seventy silver objects with stamps from the sixth and seventh centuries have come to light since the publication of *Byzantine Silver Stamps* in 1961. These new documents in the history of Byzantine silver stamps will be presented in the form of a *Supplement* to *Byzantine Silver Stamps* which is presently in prepa-

ration. While the case is too complicated to be made here, it should be pointed out that the additional material does not modify or contradict but reinforces the arguments already advanced for an origin in Constantinople—and only in Constantinople—for stamps of the Imperial kind.

If this be true, the Armenian cross fits squarely into a long tradition of silver objects with Imperial stamps, most of which follow a common style and iconography and which point to an origin in the capital. On the other hand, it was inscribed after it was fashioned, and probably in the provinces, for a local Armenian church. Although there is no indication of workshop for the two Ortiz crosses, the gilded and decorated cross is of excellent quality and is related by its design and decoration to other objects from Constantinople. This cross may have been purchased in the capital by one Georgios and then inscribed and decorated, and grossly damaged, by a local craftsman. The plain cross in the Ortiz Collection is of superior workmanship; although it could have been made anywhere, it evidently follows Constantinopolitan models. All three crosses may be dated in the sixth or early seventh century and assigned, at least, to workshops within the Constantinopolitan orbit. Further, the crosses throw light on two aspects of more general interest: the use or purpose of these crosses is indicated by the position of the inscriptions and the decoration; and they offer interesting examples of the dynamic relationship between “word” and “image” in the years preceding Iconoclasm.

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⁴⁴ *BST*, 38.

⁴⁵ *BSS*, no. 20.

⁴⁶ *BSS*, 7, 8.

⁴⁷ *BSS*, 33–35; *BST*, 38 and *passim*.

⁴⁸ *BSS*, 23–35.

⁴⁹ Mundell Mango, “L’origine des trésors d’argent syriens, VIe–VIIe s.,” *Table ronde, “Argenterie romaine et paléobyzantine,”* 11–13 octobre, 1983, Université de Paris-Sorbonne; not yet published.

Recently, in an article on the plates from Valdonne (*BSS*, nos. 91, 92), Joachim Werner writes that one plate from Valdonne has stamps from the Imperial series (no. 92). The stamps on this plate, however, are very different from the normal Imperial stamps. The point is too complicated to be taken up here but will be discussed in the *Supplement* to *Byzantine Silver Stamps* mentioned above (J. Werner, “Arbaldo (Haribaldus). Ein merowingischer Vir inluster aus der Provence?” *Mélanges de numismatique d’archéologie et d’histoire offerts à Jean Lafaurie* (Paris, 1980), 257–63.